

XV.—*Notes on some Birds of the Bessarabian Steppe.*

By MAUD D. HAVILAND, H.M.B.O.U.

THE following notes were made during July, August, and September 1917, over an area of some twenty square miles, in the extreme south-western angle of Bessarabia, bounded by the Lower Danube and the Pruth. They are necessarily scanty, for the military position often forbade the use even of binoculars, but no bird has been included unless I was well assured of its identity. For the most part the country was high open steppe, but some of the valleys were sparsely wooded with acacia and other trees, and there maize, barley, etc., were cultivated. The great marshes of the Dobrudja lay immediately in front of our camp, but unfortunately were out of bounds for ornithological exploration, as they were in enemy hands.

*Corvus cornix*. HOODED CROW. Common. Feeds gregariously with the next species.

*Corvus frugilegus*. ROOK. Very common. Numbers increased during September, possibly by immigration.

*Corvus monedula*. JACKDAW. Frequent. Probably breeds in the clay cliffs round the valleys. The nape of the neck in the Bessarabian Daw is markedly paler than in the British bird.

*Pica pica*. MAGPIE. Abundant.

*Sturnus vulgaris*. STARLING. Possibly breeds, but not recorded till mid-September when considerable flocks were seen.

*Oriolus oriolus*. GOLDEN ORIOLE. Somewhat scarce.

*Carduelis cannabina*. LINNET. Not uncommon in the open country.

*Passer domesticus* and *Passer montanus*. SPARROW. At Odessa, apparently the only Sparrow found round dwellings is *P. domesticus*, though *P. montanus* occurs along the cliffs; but west of the Dniester, as I observed while driving from Bolgrad to Odessa, the Tree-Sparrow is as common as the House-Sparrow round buildings, where the two species live side by side, until at Reni (on the Roumanian frontier) the Tree-Sparrow outnumbers the House-Sparrow by two to one. It also breeds freely out in the country.

*Emberiza calandra*. CORN-BUNTING. Occasional near cultivated ground.

*Galerida cristata*. CRESTED LARK. Abundant.

*Motacilla flava*. BLUE-HEADED WAGTAIL. Occasional on the banks of the Danube.

*Motacilla alba*. WHITE WAGTAIL. Common. Considerable flocks appeared in stormy weather with westerly winds on August 16-17.

*Anthus campestris*. TAWNY PIPIT. Not common.

*Parus cæruleus*. BLUE TIT. This species and the next are not infrequent in the valleys.

*Parus major*. GREAT TIT.

*Lanius minor*. LESSER GREY SHRIKE. Very abundant in the valleys until the end of August, when both old and young disappeared.

*Lanius collurio*. RED-BACKED SHRIKE. Much less frequent than the last, though nesting sometimes in an adjoining tree. Remains till mid-September.

*Phylloscopus trochilus*. WILLOW-WREN. Appeared in considerable numbers in mid-September.

*Sylvia communis*. WHITETHROAT. Breeds abundantly in the valleys.

*Phœnicurus phœnicurus*. REDSTART. Three birds, evidently on passage, seen late in September.

*Enanthe œnanthe*. WHEATEAR. Not infrequent on the steppe round the ruins of huts and earthworks. Two or three pairs nested in some empty Russian trenches by our camp.

*Saxicola rubetra*. WHINCHAT. Two birds of the year recorded on Sept. 16, but there was no evidence that it breeds.

*Muscicapa grisola*. SPOTTED FLYCATCHER. Half a dozen appeared on Sept. 12 and remained for a day. I had not previously noticed this species; but it possibly breeds in the wooded valleys.

*Hirundo rustica*. SWALLOW. Fairly common.

*Delichon urbica*. MARTIN. Abundant in the villages.

*Riparia riparia*. SAND-MARTIN. Breeds in swarms in the banks round the Danube. On August 11, when motoring along the causeway road to Galatz, I found the telegraph-wires crusted with literally thousands of Hirundines, but the present species outnumbered the rest by a hundred to one. The rushing of their wings, and their cries as they took flight, was so bewildering in the narrow road, that I had to slow the car down.

*Micropus apus*. SWIFT. Occasional.

*Caprimulgus europæus*. NIGHTJAR. Once observed in August at dusk.

*Merops apiaster*. BEE-EATER. Common until the third week in August, when they somewhat suddenly disappeared.

This species attends the Rooks who feed on horse-dung on the steppes, and swoops upon any winged insect put up by the larger birds.

*Coracias garrulus*. ROLLER. Common in the open country, especially near telegraph-poles. Still frequent in October.

*Upupa epops*. HOOPOE. Frequent.

*Carine noctua*. LITTLE OWL. Once recorded in a hollow willow-tree.

*Falco tinnunculus*. KESTREL. Very common on the open steppe.

*Falco vespertinus*. RED-FOOTED FALCON. This species and the Roller are the most characteristic birds of the Bessarabian steppes.

*Buteo buteo*. BUZZARD. Common.

*Nyroca fuligula*. TUFTED DUCK. Huge flocks on Itolia Lake on September 15.

*Ciconia ciconia*. WHITE STORK. Frequent, especially round Reni.

*Vanellus vanellus*. LAPWING. Not found breeding, but two flocks flew over from the Dobrudja late in August.

*Hydrochelidon leucopareia*. WHISKERED TERN. Breeds numerously in the Pruth marshes near Reni.

*Larus melanocephalus*. MEDITERRANEAN GULL. Not uncommon on the Danube and neighbouring lakes.

*Coturnix coturnix*. QUAIL. Abundant, especially on cultivated ground.